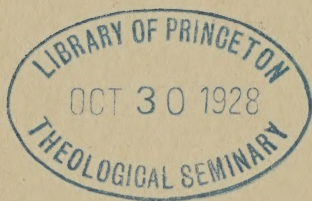


The Prophet Jonah

G. E. HAGEMAN



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THE PROPHET JONAH

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The Prophet Jonah

In Sermons

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The Prophet Jonah

His Remarkable Flight

JONAH 1:1-6.

OF all the seers, chroniclers and sages of the Old Testament Jonah is perhaps the most popularly known man in the world. But his worldly reputation is not good. For generations vulgar wit has ridiculed the story of Jonah. In some ecclesiastical quarters this story has been and still is regarded as a myth. For long this claim has been seemingly substantiated by the fact that no such city as Nineveh had ever been located. But the site of this city has been found and its ruins indicate that it must have been a city of considerable size and fame in its day. But there are still many who yet claim that the story of Jonah is a myth, for the fact of the existence of ancient Nineveh, they argue, does not yet prove the existence of the man Jonah and his peculiar experience. Perhaps so; and yet we believe that the story is literal fact.

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The Jews have always so regarded it. It was never by them called into question. It was always counted by them as part of the Scriptures and accepted as the Word of God. Then, too, the early Christians believed it. Rude pictures of Jonah and the great fish are found carved on many of the Christian gravestones in the catacombs under the city of Rome. To these Christians Jonah and the fish were the symbol of the resurrection. And finally, Christ believed this story. He used it as a sign to guarantee the truth of His claim that He would rise from the dead on the third day. Now we do not use a fable to affirm the truthfulness of a claim. How absurd and ridiculous for any one to say: "As sure as Jack climbed the beanstalk, I promise to pay this debt when it falls due." But that is what those make Jesus say when they declare that the story of Jonah is a fable. How absurd would it then not be for Jesus to appeal to Jonah's fabled experience to affirm the certainty of His rising from the dead! (Matth. 12:40). No, the story of Jonah is historic fact and as such we regard it.

"Now the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh,

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that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before Me."

Nineveh is here called a "great city." It is so described again in the third and the last chapter. Mention is also made of the fact that the city contained one hundred and twenty thousand persons "that can not discern between their right hand and their left hand." (4:11) This has generally been understood to refer to children and it is estimated that the population of the city must have been about six hundred thousand, occupying an area larger than the city of Newark. At the time of our story, about 860 B. C., Nineveh was a famous city and a powerful one as well. It is often mentioned by the prophets and Israel had often felt the power of its rulers. The Ninevites were a barbarous people whose mode of warfare was particularly cruel. Having arisen to great prominence, ruling over a large territory and controlling much of the world's trade, Nineveh was a constant menace to Israel and no Israelites willingly incurred the enmity of these people.

Now in the face of this situation God commanded Jonah to go to Nineveh, "that great city," and "cry against it." The Ninevites were

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very wicked. Their abominations were like unto those of Sodom and Gomorrah. Their worship was grossly licentious. In all their temples immorality was practiced to such an extent that the stench thereof rose to high heaven. The limit of divine long-suffering had been reached and God ordered Jonah to go to Nineveh and speak against these abominations. This was a most disagreeable task for the prophet. To speak against sin and evil is always a disagreeable task. But the ministry of the Church is always under general orders to speak against sin and wickedness. Jonah's commission is also our commission today. Substitute for Nineveh any large city of our day and the past becomes the present. All cities are the collecting places of all manner of sins and vices and crimes and by many channels this moral refuse is carried over the land into the towns and villages. Corruption is everywhere in evidence today and moral degeneration is going on apace. That this is true is evidenced by the many protests that are arising against the conditions of today. And shall the Church remain dumb? Of course, the Old Adam is rather reluctant to testify against himself. But the command of God is to speak and to cry out against

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wickedness and to warn against the judgment of God. And we who have the Word of God have the duty and the call to use every means at our command to show man his sinfulness, to bring the light of the Gospel into dark places of iniquity, to carry the lamp of the Word to the multitudes who sit in ignorance and shall perish in their sins. The knights of reform are making a great noise and curing nothing. We who have the only panacea for the world's ill must make it known and help man out of the power of sin and the devil by the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We are debtors to the Jews and the Gentiles, to the learned and the unlearned. "Arise, go to Nineveh and cry against it," was God's commission to Jonah. "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature," is Christ's commission to us.

Jonah was a man who had a mind of his own. He could quickly arrive at a decision and as quickly carry it out. As soon as he received the word from the Lord he set out forthwith—but not to Nineveh. He fled in the opposite direction. He ran away from God! He immediately went down to Joppa, a seaport, to look for a ship to carry him as far away as possible. And he

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found a ship ready to sail for Spain. How fortunate! God did not seem to interpose any objection to his course. Sometimes God lays obstacles in the way of a man to prevent him from doing himself harm. At other times he permits man to go his own way and apparently does not care. And as long as that man is successful in his scheme, he thinks that God is with him. But when that man fails, he is just as likely to turn on God and blame him for the failure. But God is at fault in neither course. He is never the Author of evil. Many a man, however, can not be delivered from his obstinacy, except by allowing him to ensnare himself in his own folly. And that is what God proceeded to do with Jonah. The prophet created his own dilemma.

God had commanded him to go East, but he went West. And Jonah paid a good price for that passage to Spain. He was stubborn and reckless to spite God. There are many Jonahs in the world, also in the congregations. How often do not people attempt to run away from God, when they can not have their own way or the admonition from God's Word does not suit them. They leave the church and join other company. And they usually pay a high price in time

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and money wasted, in honor and conscience despoiled, in cares and troubles heaped up.—And why did Jonah flee? Because he disagreed with God. He argued: If I go not to Nineveh, then God's judgment will come upon that city for its wickedness. If I go and cry against it, they may repent and God may have mercy on these heathen. God has already decided to punish them for their iniquity; why should I lend a hand to save them? They deserve it after all the wrongs they have done to Israel. So he may have argued. And yet, while he refused to do anything for the heathen Ninevites, he was not ashamed to use the heathen mariners to further his own interests. He hired them to carry him to a foreign land to make it impossible for him to go to Nineveh. I dare say, that Jonah is not alone in this deed. How about our attitude to the heathen? We daily enjoy the gifts of many lands, which world commerce brings to our shores. Do we ever consider that these goods are the fruits of the labor of heathen peoples? They work for us, what do we for them? You say, you pay for these things. But is there not higher compensation than dollars and cents that we owe these benighted peoples of the world? Do we not owe them the Gospel of

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forgiveness and eternal life? And yet, when appeal is made to the love of Christians to support the great enterprises of the Church in spreading the light of the Gospel, how cold is the response. We do not want to be bothered with responsibility for these people and their condition. When the prophet flees, Nineveh sinks deeper into the mire of ungodliness. But the prophet is responsible nevertheless, since God has laid on him the command to go.

Jonah fled from the presence of the Lord. How foolish! By going down to the sea in a ship, he fled directly into the hands of the Almighty. And he cut off his escape as well. They had no sooner reached the high seas, when God sent a storm. The tempest was so violent that it threatened to wreck the ship. In terror the mariners cast the cargo overboard to save the ship. But their efforts seemed futile. As a last resort every man cried to his own god for help in this dire distress. How significant: each man cried to his own god. They form one company, but each man has a god of his own to whom he prays and none knows the true God. It is a pitiable situation. But it is a true picture of our modern unionism whose aim is to unite all churches into

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one body, to form one fine ecclesiastical ship. It is to have no particular creed at the masthead, except the rag "Fatherhood of God and Brotherhood of Man." And in this ship each is to have his own god; he may believe what he chooses, as long as he lets the other man alone. And when that ship's company begins to pray, what a piti-able bedlam. Each one makes his own god and yet has no God, just like these mariners.

But where is Jonah? We are told that he "was gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay and was fast asleep." He had hidden from the curiosity and prying eyes of the crew in the hold of the vessel and there had gone to sleep. How could he sleep while death stalked its prey? Jonah felt secure in his scheme; so sure, indeed, that he could sleep during a great storm. The captain on an inspection of the ship found the sleeping prophet in the hold and overcome by the sight he exclaimed: "What meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not." Every sailor had prayed to his god in vain; perhaps this stranger knows the God who rules the winds and the sea. Up and pray to your God! A heathen must remind a prophet of the true

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God of his duty! The irony of it! Here Jonah had been commanded by God to go to the heathen and tell them of their sins and their duty to worship the one true God, and now when the prophet had fled the heathen must remind the prophet of his duty. Must God use similar means with us to awaken us to our responsibility to preach the Gospel everywhere? Shall God raise up the heathen, the unbelieving world, to accuse us before we will do God's will and let the world know that Jesus Christ is the only Savior from sin and damnation, that the world should repent of its sins and believe on the Redeemer? "Arise," calls the heathen world, "call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not."

His Remarkable Discovery

JONAH 1:7-10.

“**T**HE heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth His handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard,” writes David in the 19th Psalm. All of creation bears witness to the Creator. Its testimony is so loud, clear, powerful and unmistakable, that man must either be a fool or bereft of reason not to hear it. Everywhere the Creator has left His footprints, sometimes faint and sometimes broad and deep. When, for instance, the waters of the seas roar and are troubled we have an unmistakable manifestation of the overwhelming majesty and power of God. Not only secular authors and poets have admitted the inadequacy of human language to describe the incomparable grandeur of the sea when its waters are troubled; not only have men confessed that nowhere else do they feel so insignificantly small and helpless as when riding the waves of an angry sea, but God

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Himself points to the ocean as a symbol of His almighty power, when He says to Job: "Or who shut up the sea with doors, when it brake forth, as if it had issued forth out of the womb? When I made the cloud the garment thereof and thick darkness a swaddling band for it and brake up for it my decreed place, and set bars and doors and said: Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further, and here shall thy proud waves be staid." What a mighty power is the sea, obedient only to the hand of the Almighty!

And yet Jonah, as we have seen fled from the presence of the Lord and went down to the sea in a ship. He had been ordered by God to go to Nineveh, but he refused to go and tried to run away from God. How foolish and childish this was soon became apparent, for by going to sea he walked onto the palm of the hand of the Almighty. And no sooner had they reached the high seas, when God stirred the waves thereof and troubled them. He sent a mighty tempest and thundered and roared in such a terrific fashion, that it seemed to the mariners that the ship must fall apart and be swamped. They jettisoned the cargo and exhausted every effort to keep the vessel afloat, but it all seemed

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futile. The sea seemed determined to destroy the ship. In their helplessness the seamen cried aloud, each man unto his own god. They were in despair. And finally the mariners discovered the prophet Jonah in the hold of the vessel fast asleep. Desperately they shook him awake and cried: "Arise, O sleeper, what meanest thou sleeping while the tempest roars and the wild waves threaten to engulf us!" What a situation! A prophet of the true God rebuked by terrified pagans! Shamefacedly he stood before his accusers without a word of defence. Though his conscience accused him he said nothing. But wilder even than the tumult of the elements must have been the storm raging in his bosom. He stood in immediate peril of his life at the hands of an angry God. And he knew it. It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of enraged Providence. "For the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether." Jonah knew that God had a right to be angry with him. It was an awful situation for Jonah to be in, for the demands of divine justice are terrible when we are wrong and we have no defence to make. Jesus said: "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul. But rather fear Him

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which is able to destroy both body and soul in hell."

But Jonah, it seems, did not yet fully realize his situation, for he did a further foolish thing. Instead of acknowledging his guilt he sought to hide it behind outward calmness. He acted innocent and tried to squirm out of the dilemma. In this he is typical of the average person. Natural man never willingly confesses his sins. He does not want to admit them and humiliate himself. His heart is proud and conceited and "desperately wicked." Man always will try to whitewash himself. But God is not deceived. He does not only look upon the countenance. He sees the heart. God is not mocked. You can not escape the eyes of God. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." "If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His Word is not in us," warns the apostle John. The only way to get right with God is to admit that you are a sinner and to confess your sins before Him. And "if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

On the discovery of the sleeping prophet it seems that the whole crew gathered about him.

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A conference was held then and there and they hit upon a solution. "And they said every one to his fellow. Come, let us cast lots that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us. So they cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah." Though Jonah knew very well that he was guilty, he maintained his stolid demeanor and joined the sailors in the casting of the lots, as though the whole transaction did not concern him. He simulated innocence and figured to take the chance that he might escape the predicament. One lie always breeds another. But let us turn our attention to this act of the mariners. Jonah is already tied with the cords of the Almighty and he can not escape. These pagan sailors, you will note, see some special significance in this storm. They do not regard the tempest as an accident, the aimless result of the prevailing forces of nature, as it is called today. They see in this storm a manifestation of the anger of their gods or of some god unknown to them. Would you call that superstition? Is it superstition to believe that storms, earthquakes, floods, plagues, war, and all manner of calamities are the fruits of man's sin? Is it superstition to believe that God is manifesting His wrath and is punishing man for his sins which

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cry to heaven for retribution? That is the prevailing notion of today. Whenever a tornado or some sudden hurricane devastates the land, whenever earthquakes unexpectedly engulf whole cities, whenever great catastrophes and conflagrations take a tremendous toll in lives and property, our newspaper scribblers everywhere are quick to explain in minute detail how everything happened just so, because the laws of nature act so and so. And if it were only our newspaper philosophers who wrote thus, it would yet be bearable because we do not expect anything better from the unbelieving world. But it is most painful to earnest Christians when supposedly Christian leaders join this sing-song and declare that "God had nothing to do with it. When man did not know better, he attributed everything to divine powers. But we of this enlightened and scientific age,—we know better. We know that God is love. We know that all such calamities are nothing more than elements of progress through which the human race must pass in its climb upward to a higher degree of perfection. Man's energy and enterprise will soon convert the apparent loss into gain and strive for even greater things. A greater city will rise out of the ruins!" Maybe so; but it is a

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very poor conception of God and man's responsibility to Him. It rules out all fear of God, throws sin on the ash-heap, and makes the judgments of God of none effect. Even among pagans it was said: "When the gods fail to punish, they fail to be. But as surely as they do exist, so surely will they punish." Modern paganism, however, has conceived a god so puffed up with love that he is deaf, dumb and blind and totally helpless to control what he has made. Such mockery and defiance of God is smeared broad and thick over the so-called scientific explanations of untoward events. "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good." Even the heathen sailors had more sense.

These mariners concluded correctly that sin and wrong was the cause of this storm. For as the sweat on the brow of the toiler and the thorns and thistles of the field are the fruits of sin, so by and large sin may be said to be the root of every evil which now besets man. And great calamities in particular preach a loud sermon on the guilt of man and the retributive justice of God. On the other hand, however, these pagan mariners were wrong in that they attributed the cause of this

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particular evil to some particular individual, even though in this case they discovered the right party. Jesus teaches us how wrong it is to make such deductions. His disciples once asked Him, pointing to a man who had been born blind: "Master, who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Our Lord replied: "Neither hath this man sinned nor his parents, but that the works of the Lord should be made manifest in him." On another occasion when a man in one of Jesus' audiences reported the calamity which had befallen some Galileans, the Lord Himself quoted a similar instance of men who had been killed by the fall of the tower of Siloam and said in reference to both cases: "Think ye that they were sinners above all men? I tell you, Nay; but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." The apostle Paul also furnishes another example. While gathering wood on the beach for a fire, he was bitten by a poisonous snake. Immediately the pagan inhabitants of the island of Malta concluded: "No doubt this man is a murderer whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live." We must always be careful not to make such dangerous deductions. It is not within our province to say that some individ-

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uals were to blame for some particular calamity. Let us rather look to ourselves and acknowledge that we are just as guilty as these who perished in their sins, that we deserve nothing but punishment and it is only due to God's mercy, that He graciously reminded us to repent of our sins and to flee for refuge to the righteousness which is in Christ Jesus. And yet, while we leave the judgment of individuals to God, we must exercise equal care not to pass over such occurrences lightly just because we did not suffer. Let us always remember God's justice and grace; that He is just to punish sin and that He is gracious to forgive us our sins if we confess them. That is the Christian spirit.

When the lot fell upon Jonah the mariners put him under a severe cross-examination. "Tell us, we pray thee, for whose cause this evil is upon us." They do not condemn him forthwith. They give him a chance to defend himself. They are at least fair, much fairer than the accusers of the true and innocent Jonah whom we know as Jesus Christ. In His case we are told: "And the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused Him." These pagans also distinguish themselves markedly from many of our present-day Christians

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of both sexes who sit in judgment on every one who has fallen by the wayside and torment him or her to death with their hue and cry and wagging of tongues. The worst pagans are always those who clothe themselves in pious trappings.

The sailors in our story also inquire of Jonah his occupation. "What is thine occupation?" In other words, what is your trade? Why did they ask that question, we wonder. There was a reason for that inquiry. In the eyes of pagan people of those days as well as today some occupations are dishonorable and displeasing to the gods. Perhaps the gods were angry because Jonah followed some abominable trade. To the ancient Egyptians, for instance, shepherds and cattle drovers were disreputable men. They were regarded as outcasts. In the Middle Ages many foolish superstitions were ascribed to the office of public executioner. Even today the executioner is not regarded with favor and he usually remains unknown. The Buddhists regard a butcher as cursed by God because one of the five main laws enjoin a Buddhist never to kill a living being. Sects such as the Quakers and Mennonites regard military service as well as the holding of any public office as unchristian and sinful. Now there are sinful

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occupations today in which a Christian can not engage with a good conscience. To enumerate them is not necessary. Each man must follow the dictates of his own conscience in this matter. As a general rule it may be said that a Christian will avoid every trade or profession in which he can not do an honest day's work and earn his bread honestly. Let us remember that when we choose a profession or trade. Let all things be done honorably in the sight of God and men.

The mariners also asked Jonah another question: "Whence camest thou? What is thy country? and of what people art thou?" They want to know his nationality. Perhaps this was the cause of this evil which had come upon them. The pagan also attributed his dislikes to his gods. He believed that whatever nation he abhorred and disliked, the gods also hated and cursed. The whole religious system of paganism furnishes us with a good idea of the thoughts and the imaginations of natural man's heart. And this same blind, ignorant heart of unregenerate man is still the source of all error and heresy. Not the alleged obscurity of the Bible, not the alleged contradictions of the Bible, not the foolishness of the Gospel, but the perversity of man and his desire

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to have a god who will do his will and suit his fancy is the root of all error and rebellion against God.

Under this severe scrutiny Jonah finally yields. His heart melts and his tongue is unloosed to make a frank confession. Escape is impossible. "I am an Hebrew," says Jonah, "and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land." As he admits his nationality he makes a confession of his faith, honoring the true God, the invisible One, not made with man's hands, who in all creation reveals Himself as the one God above all gods. From Him Jonah had fled; Him he had disobeyed. When the pagan sailors heard this they were shocked; they were startled; they shrank back horrified. "Why hast thou done this?" they exclaimed. How could you do such a thing! You say, that you believe in the God, the Lord, who made heaven and earth? No wonder the wrath of your God is enkindled against you. Now we shall all perish because of your insane folly! So they drove home the inconsistency of his act. And the prophet could say nothing. He was dumb with shame and mortification.

It was a very pointed sermon which Jonah had

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to hear from the lips of these pagan men. And that is not the first and the last time that a professor of the true religion has been told the bitter truth by pagans, by unbelievers. It often occurs today that unbelieving, wordly people chide Christians and say: You profess to believe in the church, but you do not attend your church. You profess to be a follower of Christ, but you do not follow His precepts. You profess to believe in missions, but you do not support them. You profess that God owns everything, but you do not act like it. You profess to believe that God controls everything, but you do not pray to Him. You profess to believe in the Bible as God's Word, but you do not read it. Many and other similar challenges are flung into the face of professed Christians today. And who will say that they are not justified? that they are not true? Even the apostle Paul in his day had to complain that the name of God was being blasphemed among the Gentiles. We may well heed the admonition of the apostle: "See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise," so that none may charge us and say: "What hast thou done?"

His Remarkable Punishment

JONAH 1:11-16.

THE book of Jonah is a remarkably human document. Perhaps in the whole Bible we have no other story which supplies us with such a clear cross-section of the human heart, not only in its natural sinful state but also in its converted state. It describes life so graphically and intimately from so many different angles, that it gives us a true reflection of ourselves. And human interest stories are always fascinating. Disobedience, pride, stubbornness, false security, despair, fear, falsehood, inconsistency, ignorance, shame, confession, humiliation, faith, hope, trust, patience, and many other vices and virtues are here finely exhibited. The scenes are so vivid and so practical, that we are involuntarily moved to reach into our bosoms to feel that we have the same flesh to contend with. St. Paul writes to Timothy that the Holy Scripture "is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." And

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all of these points find demonstration in this story. But while it shows us the instability of man's heart, it also describes the pitying, helping, healing, long-suffering kindness of God. God's will must be done on earth as it is in heaven. And yet God is solicitous of man's welfare. He does not wish the death of any sinner, but that he should turn from his evil ways and live. The story of Jonah shows us that God's glory and man's salvation are on the same level.

We had reached that point in the story where they cast lots to find out for whose cause this storm and terrible hardship had come upon them. Jonah under close questioning had finally admitted his guilt to the amazement of the pagan sailors who exclaimed: "Why hast thou done this?" How could you flee from your God who is the Lord of heaven and earth and from whom there is no escape? But during this conference the storm had not abated. It was increasing in violence and casting up tremendous seas. The gale was actually digging into the sea and lifting the waves with terrific force and hurling them against the ship. Nothing like it had ever been experienced by these seamen. They could not help but feel that in all this turmoil of the elements there was

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some significance. They had found the culprit who apparently was the cause of all this, but this discovery had not helped them any nor had it calmed the sea. They argued that the steady increase of the storm was a sign that something had to be done. But what? How was the wrong to be atoned for? Let the prophet speak. He was the cause. Let him offer a solution. So they ask: "What shall we do unto thee that the sea may be calm unto us?"

Their behavior in this respect is significant. From it we learn how far natural man can see by the light of his own reason. By his own reason he can see and know that there is a God; that God necessarily must be angry with man on account of the sins; that some atonement must be made if man is to escape the penalty of his sins. But this is the limit of his knowledge. He can reason no further. Man's reasoning within these limits has produced the various natural religions which are in existence today outside of Christianity. Natural religion and the Christian religion are here in agreement as to these essential facts; there is a God, man is a sinner, divine justice demands punishment of the sinner, atonement must be made for sin. But as soon as human reason proceeds to determine the

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manner in which sin must be atoned for, natural religion goes astray. On the method of atonement man is in total darkness and ignorance. Human reason here becomes a will-o'-the-wisp to lead man deeper into the mire of sin and error and finally to his death. All pagan religions sought to appease the wrath of the gods by animal sacrifices, sometimes by human sacrifices. All these sacrifices were worthless, of course. Why should God accept the sacrificial death of animals in atonement for the sin of man? God Himself daily creates innumerable millions of animals and by the same might He takes their lives again. But did not the Israelites offer animal sacrifices? What made theirs valid? The sacrifices of Israel were made in view of the sacrificial death of the Messiah. All of Israel's sacrifices typified Christ and therein lay the real power of their sacrifices to atone for sin, not in the sacrifice itself or in the animal. This is not true, of course, of heathen sacrifices. They knew nothing of the Christ and their sacrifices were worthless. True repentance and faith was missing—repentance for sin and faith in the redemption of man by Christ. For this reason God also declined the hypocritical and unbelieving sacrifices of Israel and said: "He that killeth an

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ox is as if he slew a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb as if he cut off a dog's neck; he that offereth an oblation as if he offered swine's blood; he that burneth incense as if he blessed an idol. Yea, they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations." (Isaiah 66, 5) What God desired was a man of a poor and contrite spirit, one who trembled at his word.

And into what terrible abominations has not natural man fallen, because he would follow his own reason and refused to heed God's Word? What tortures and murders have not been and still are being committed by man in his effort to atone for his sins in his own way? Cruel and barbarous and savage in the extreme have been his methods of atonement. Here pagan priests have dragged young men and women to their altars and with incredible speed and dexterity of hand and knife have torn their still pulsing hearts from their breasts and offered these twitching, quivering, bloody vitals as sacrifices to the sun. There mothers under the dictates of natural religion have laid their screaming and protesting babes into the red hot arms of Moloch and immolated them alive. Here an idol worshipper hurls himself under the crunching wheels of some

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sacred vehicle; there another, bleeding from a hundred wounds, crawls around a "holy" city or permits himself to be entombed alive. What horrors have not been committed by man in his effort to reconcile God to himself. The whole history of man bears witness to the fact that man's reason in the sphere of religion profits him nothing, and yet how difficult is it not even for us to cast down reasonings and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and to bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. (2 Cor. 10, 5)

To go back to our story, when the sailors asked Jonah: "What shall we do unto thee that the sea may be calm unto us," they no longer followed their own reason. The fear of the Lord God who made heaven and earth was now in their hearts and they now acted wisely and humbly, confirming the truth of the Psalmist's words: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." They were ready to hear what God had to say to them through His prophet. Greater wisdom can no man show than when he governs his footsteps by the lamp of God's Word. You will never go wrong when you give heed to divine wisdom revealed in the Scriptures. To their question Jonah

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replied: "Take me up and cast me forth into the sea, so shall the sea be calm unto you. For I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you." But did not the prophet follow the light of his own reason here? Not so hasty; for Jonah not only states what is to be done with him, but he also states very clearly what will happen, namely, "so shall the sea be calm unto you." How could Jonah know "by his own reason or strength" that the sea would calm? As little as you or I could have known that beforehand. But just because it happened exactly as Jonah predicted, we are convinced that Jonah's answer to the seamen was inspired by God. Indeed, he not only here spoke as a prophet, but unconsciously, as in the case of many of other prophets of the Old Testament, he typified Christ. Jonah is ready to give his life to save the lives of these sailors. He offers to die to atone for sin. And in this he foreshadowed Christ, with this distinction, however, that Jesus was without sin. Jesus suffered death willingly to atone for the sin of the whole world. He gave Himself into the raging sea of God's wrath and by His willing sacrifice He appeased God's anger against the sins of mankind. And all that is now necessary for us is to believe that Christ died for

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us, in our stead, and that through Him we have redemption, even the redemption of our souls.

We now come to another remarkable scene in this story. Jonah had commanded them to cast him into the sea. But instead of rushing upon him and hurling him overboard, they hesitated. They were reluctant to accept his word. They were reluctant to lay hands on the prophet of the great God Jehovah of the Hebrews. They regarded his suggestion as foolish and returned to their tasks. They dugged their oars deep into the sea and bent every effort to bring the ship to land. But their efforts were futile. The harder they worked the harder the gale blew against them. Finally they acknowledged defeat, being convinced that God demanded the life of the prophet. And still they hesitated. Before laying hands on the prophet they uttered a strange prayer, strange from the lips of pagans. "We beseech Thee, O Lord, we beseech Thee, let us not perish with this man's life and lay not upon us innocent blood. For Thou, O Lord, hast done as it pleased Thee." These pagans felt, what those who call themselves Christians sometimes do not seem to feel, that the guilt of a man does not yet give them the right to take his life. They feel that they are not the

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judges of this man, so they ask God not to look upon them as murderers if they obey the prophet's word. Lay not this act to our charge! If he is innocent, let not his blood be upon our heads, upon our hands. We are doing as Thou hast commanded. "What a clean, God-fearing and Christian conscience these men had," says Luther, "men who in the past never bothered about a murder or bothered about God." How wonderfully God at times reveals Himself to the children of men! We marvel at His ways. They are past finding out.

After this prayer, the unburdening of their hearts, they laid hold of Jonah and cast him into the sea. And behold, the sea immediately "ceased from her raging." This miracle was a proof to them of the almighty power of the God of Jonah, that they had found the true God, though under most extraordinary circumstances. And in token of their gratitude for their deliverance by the God of the Hebrew prophet, the Lord of heaven and earth, the sailors "offered a sacrifice unto the Lord," and no doubt ever after they worshipped the Lord God who had revealed Himself to them in such a wonderful fashion. About eight hundred years later other men by a similar miracle on the

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Sea of Galilee learned to know the identity of the true God in that other great Jonah and exclaimed: "What manner of man is this that even the winds and the sea obey Him?" And we know that later these disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ went out into the world to preach the Gospel of the forgiveness of sin through the merits of the Redeemer who gave His life as a ransom for many; that these humble fishermen of Galilee brought themselves as a living sacrifice to make known to the world that this same Jesus whom God raised up from the dead was the only hope of man and that in Him alone there is salvation and eternal life. And you, my friends, whom God has called out of darkness into His marvellous light of the Gospel of peace and joy, can show forth God's praises no better than to give yourselves as a living sacrifice in your life and your faith, letting your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven. This is your reasonable service, for Christ has bought you, has purchased and won you from all sin, from death and from the power of the devil.

Yea, "good and upright is the Lord, therefore will He teach sinners in the way." "All the paths

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of the Lord are mercy and truth." Even the evil ways of men He turns to His glory. Since Jonah would not have pity on Nineveh and fled from the presence of the Lord, he is made to be a prophet of righteousness to other pagans, so that they forget all their vain gods and worship the Lord. And Jonah must yet go to Nineveh. God's will must be done. "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live." Yea, "God would have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." That is one of the grand elements of the Gospel. Believest thou this?

His Remarkable Rescue

JONAH 1:17; 2:1.10.

“**T**HY way, O God, is in the sanctuary. Who is so great a God as our God? Thou art the God that doest wonders. Thou hast declared Thy strength among the people. . . . The water saw Thee, O God, the water saw Thee. They were afraid; the depths also were troubled. The clouds poured out water. The skies sent out a sound. Thine arrows also went abroad; the voice of Thy thunder was in the heaven. The lightnings enlightened the world. The earth trembled and shook. Thy way is in the sea and Thy path in the great waters, and Thy footsteps are not known.” Let us bear these reverent worshipful words of the 77th Psalm in mind as we now approach the second chapter of the story of Jonah, upon which the learned and unlearned world has heaped so much scorn and ridicule in a most intolerant, foolish and fanatic fashion. Sobriety has always been here at a premium. Many have been so open-mouthed and loud in their condemnation of this

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chapter that had they been in Jonah's place they surely would have swallowed the great fish instead of the great fish swallowing Jonah.

Now it is true that our reason often stumbles over this and similar miracles which are related in the Old Testament. And we do not particularly need a learned professor to call our attention to its unusual features. Even a Luther said: "This story is so remarkable as to tax belief, indeed it sounds more untruthful and more improbable than many a fable of the poets. And if it were not a part of the Scripture I would laugh at it as a falsehood. I myself would not believe it, if it were not in the Holy Scriptures." It is an unusual story in this part, but every miracle is unusual. If it were not so it would not be a miracle. And every miracle appears unbelievable to our reason. But it is most unreasonable to regard just this miracle so unbelievable. Whoever denies the truthfulness of this miracle must logically also deny the possibility of any miracles, for one miracle is just as great as the next. And our modern critics of the Bible, as critics of all times, do deny the possibility of any miracles ever happening or having happened. They do not be-

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lieve the Bible to be God's Word. Natural religion always decries all supernaturalism. Its God is nature and beside this there is no other God. Natural religion has no Creator. It believes in the cell, the atom and the electron. But those who claim to be Christians and seek to compromise on just this miracle, do not realize that by compromising with the unbelieving world here, they are denying the possibility of all miracles related in the Bible. Compromise here and you }
give up your God and your Bible. To deny the }
miracles of the Bible means to deny God the Father and Creator, God the Son and Redeemer, God the Holy Spirit Comforter and Teacher, as well as heaven and hell, salvation and damnation, revelation and prophecy, in short, all the articles of faith of the Christian religion. If there are no miracles then the creation of the world, the fall of man, the flood, the tower of Babel, the history of the patriarchs, the whole history of the Israelites, in fact, everything in the Bible is nothing but fairy tales. Are you ready to treat the Bible so arbitrarily, when Jesus said of it: "The Scriptures can not be broken," that He came to fulfill it, that it will judge us on the last day?

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And more than that; if we throw out all miracles and so draw the truth of the whole Bible in question, what will be the result? Man will fall prey to the grossest kind of superstition yet known. He will finally become so wonderfully adept in the science of unbelief and skepticism, that it will be equally as ridiculous to believe in the existence of God as it once was to believe in ghosts. And in the end man will believe in nothing but ghosts and apparitions. He will become a fetish worshipper. He will be so wise and so enlightened in his own conceit that he will believe himself to be a god. Did not the devil in the garden assure the first pair that they would be like gods, if they ate of the fruit of the tree? Look around you and see how the unbelieving world is strutting, puffed up with its own importance. And what a host of fortune tellers, soothsayers, astrologers, palmists, diviners, and like ilk are being supported by our wise moderns who refuse to believe in the miracles of the Bible. They prefer to seek dark places where their self-made prophets peep and mutter strange things,—inane, absurd and foolish. What conquests are not being made today by spiritualism, Bahaism,

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theosophy, Christian Science, and other frauds among our modern intellectuals who profess to scorn superstition! It was always so and it always will remain so. He who refuses to believe the wisdom which cometh down from above, from the Father of lights, will become a slave to the wisdom which cometh from below from the father of lies. A mind which is closed to belief in the miracles of the Bible will delight in the lies of the devil. "But natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." Let us not be misled by the vain glory of this world's wisdom, but let us have the mind of Christ who had no hesitation in teaching the truthfulness of this story of Jonah.

We Christians believe this story because it is in the Scripture. If it were related anywhere else we would not believe it. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God," and this story is part of that Holy Scripture. God does not lie. He is true and righteous altogether. This Bible alone is the foundation of our faith, "all other ground is sinking sand." And Christian faith is not merely acceptance of the statements of the

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Bible on the basis of credible witnesses. God is a witness unto Himself. Our faith is the firm conviction of the heart and for that we need solid ground. And there is no better ground than the Bible, God's Word. "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away," Jesus assures. And standing on the vantage point of the eternal rock of God's wisdom and truth, we may fearlessly say to all those who shy at miracles: Do not exhaust yourselves in mustering proofs against the credibility of this story. If you do not want to believe it, then do not believe it. The responsibility therefor rests with you. You do not have to believe a word of the Bible, if you do not want to. There is none to compel you. But do not think that your unbelief ties the hands of our God or overthrows the truth of His Word. You may stumble at His Word, but it will remain withal and long after you have vanished from the scene to account for your attitude to that Word. But if you want to be a genuine Christian, then at least honor the Lord God so much, that you believe that God retained so much of His almighty power after the creation of all things by the word of His mouth, that He was

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able to rescue one of his poor prophets who had been misled by his own wisdom, and rescue him as He did. He who created all things out of nothing, you among them, did not exhaust all his power and wisdom. He retained enough of both to do much great miracles, far more glorious works than you have ever seen or heard. He has carried you and all His creatures in His wonderful arms and He will some day carry you into a wonderland and show you things which eye hath not seen nor ear hath heard nor ever hath entered into the heart of man. Trust him. Believe on Him. All His works are done in truth. Did He not promise the Redeemer and fulfill His word? The Lord is not slack as some men count slackness.

“Now the Lord had prepared a great fish,” we read in the story of Jonah’s remarkable rescue. In Matthew 12 where Jesus refers to this story, our English Bible uses the word “whale.” But the word used in the original does not necessarily mean a whale, but is a general term meaning a great fish, as here in the story of Jonah. Of what species this sea monster was is immaterial. The emphasis is not on the means which God used but

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upon His power to save by any means He sees fit. Practically all miracles have been done by God through creatures which He made. The Lord commands and they obey. We can not command the creature world to do our will, but we can study the forces of nature and use the gifts which they supply to satisfy our needs. God made them for that purpose and so we are to use them. He who would eat without working for a livelihood; he who would heal without medicinal agencies which God has supplied; he who would be saved without the Gospel which God has revealed for that purpose, is nothing but a quack and a dreamer. Where there is no promise there can be no faith. Faith subsists on the divine promises, both in the natural and the spiritual world.

Then too, whatever the kind of fish which swallowed Jonah, there is no real ground for denying the possibility of a fish of great size doing what was done here. For there are many instances recorded where great sea monsters swallowed human beings whole. A number of Bible students quote such cases from the secular news to substantiate this story. So it is related that large sharks have devoured men bodily and have

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spewed them out again. There are other cases of a similar nature. But such stories from the news of the day add nothing to the credibility of this story. It is not a wise and safe course to seek to substantiate the truthfulness of the Bible in this manner, because such cases are dependent upon the unreliable observations of men. If God's Word can not stand in its own right, then it does not deserve to stand at all. Who are we that we should corroborate His eternal truth?

Jonah's story stands. None can impeach its veracity with impunity. It is God's Word of which Jesus declared that heaven and earth shall sooner pass away than that one jot or tittle shall be lost. Even the greatest story this world has ever heard, the Gospel of the salvation of man from his sins through our Lord Jesus Christ, has been attacked from time immemorial as incredible, regarded by the Greeks as foolishness and by the Jews as a stumblingblock. And yet, "where are the wise?" writes Paul, "where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath God not made foolish the wisdom of the world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of

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preaching to save them that believe." Your eternal destiny depends on your faith in God's Word. Though all the world declare that it is foolish and unreasonable to believe everything in the Bible, rest not your hope of eternal salvation on the opinion of men, put not your trust in unstable and unreliable public opinion which vaunts itself and is puffed up with its own importance, but "trust in the Lord with all thine heart and lean not unto thine own understanding."

His Remarkable Prayer

JONAH 2:2-9.

THAT Jonah was fully conscious of and thoroughly alive to his awful predicament is instanced by this remarkable prayer of the prophet in which he gives us a description of his sensations during those terrible three days and nights in the body of the fish. And if we still want proof of the truthfulness and historical character of this story we have it here. We have all kinds of fables and myths from the ancients, but in all pagan literature there is no prayer which can compare with this one of Jonah. It is the prayer of a true Israelite. It is not a plea for help, but an expression of praise to the Lord who can help in every trouble. "Call upon Me in the day of trouble and I will deliver thee and thou shalt glorify Me." Jonah had experienced the power of this promise and he here in this prayer glorified God for his deliverance.

The Spirit of God broods over this prayer, for it is taken chiefly from the Psalms. As an Israelite he knew the Psalter well. And yet just be-

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cause he makes such abundant use of the Psalms to express his feelings, rationalists argue that this part of the story is also spurious. Jonah is not original in his prayer. He copied from others. Now why this should be an objection to the story, is hard to see. Why should not a believer, a prophet, an Israelite call upon the greatest treasure of the ancient Church and apply the experience of believers of other generations to his own case? What is wrong with that? Our critics argue that to do so is plagiarism. But to find in the experiences of others a reflection of your own is no crime before God. You need be no genius to arrive at the conclusion in the light of God's Law that you are a sinner. We are all conceived and born in sin and sin before God is always sin, no matter what name you may give it. And in his sinfulness the condition of man is alike all over the world and his experiences on account of sin make man akin to his brother. If he is at all observant he will see that his neighbor has the same struggles with this evil as he. Only those who deny that they are sinners and prattle about the nobility of man, can quibble about the originality of man's expression of that which moves his heart when he finds him-

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self in common with the lot of others and makes the same discovery as Jonah did.

There is thus nothing unusual in Jonah's use of the Psalms. Every believer who lives in the Word of God and has treasured in his heart many of the gems of wisdom and promise of the Bible will do the same as Jonah. Our Lord Jesus also prayed in the words of Psalms. And every Christian knows by experience that when he is in trouble the use of the words and promises of God gives him confidence to ask his heavenly Father as a dear child asks its dear father. That is exactly why Luther's hymns are so powerful. He sings in the words of the prophets and the apostles and therefore his words are a power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth. Blessed is the man who has stored away in his heart a good collection of Bible passages and is able in days of trouble to call forth precious promises of God. That is also the reason why the Holy Spirit has recorded so many prayers of believers in the Scriptures, that we may learn the better to pray and to come before God in all boldness and confidence.

In the opening words of his prayer we have the theme. "I cried out of mine affliction unto the

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Lord and He heard me; out of the belly of hell I cried and Thou heardest me." These are words from the 120th and 18th Psalms, but they are altered to fit the situation in which Jonah found himself as a result of his disobedience. To apply the words of Scripture to one's own situation is an art at which every Christian ought to be adept. Make the words of Scripture your own and your prayer will have power and give comfort in every time of stress. When Jonah says that he "cried out of the belly of hell," he indicates that he not only tasted the bitterness of temporal death but also the horrors of eternal death. Man may deny the existence of the devil and hell, but when his conscience awakes he needs no further evidence of their reality. And mercy is never so sweet as when a man has passed through the valley of the shadow of despond and despair and has found comfort in the rod and staff of the great Shepherd and Bishop of souls, Jesus Christ, "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world."

Jonah continues: "For Thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas. And the floods compassed me about, all Thy billows and Thy waves passed over me. Then said I, I am cast out

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of Thy sight, yet will I look again to Thy holy temple." God had cast Jonah into the sea. Put the emphasis in the right place. It was the hand of the Almighty which had seized him. The sailors who had lifted him up and cast him overboard were only the executors of God's will. Jonah knew very well that the waves and the billows which passed over him as he sank into the depths were the servants of God too. Here Jonah had Psalm 42 in mind which speaks in similar language. Blessed is the man who sees the hand of God in every circumstance of life and humbles himself in true repentance. The apostle Peter writes: "God resisteth the proud and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time." Under the judgment of God upon his disobedience Jonah humbled himself under the mighty hand of the Lord. He relinquished his proud and adamant spirit when he made confession of his sin. And that was the right thing for him to do and God gave him the grace to pray to the Lord in his humility. God looks for a contrite heart in the sinner. It is often said that there are many people who are not Christians and yet lead highly moral and respectable lives. That

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may be so before men, but let us not forget that God looketh upon the heart and not on the countenance. The favorite virtue of our Lord Jesus was humility which He exemplified in His own life and which He impressed upon His disciples. For none but the humble and contrite can accept the yoke of the cross and follow after Jesus truly believing in His merits for the forgiveness of sin and the inheritance of eternal life. Jeremiah gives a true description of those who refuse to acknowledge their sins when he says: "Thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; Thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction. They have made their faces harder than a rock." Man can withstand the grace of God and in consequence God can not exalt them into His kingdom.

"Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous but grievous," writes the apostle to the Hebrews. And that is how Jonah felt in this situation. When he was thrown into the sea he thought that his end had come. "I am cast out of Thy sight." Jonah felt that he deserved to be punished. His sin of disobedience was so great that it seemed to put up a wall between him and his God, so that he was lost from the sight of

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God forever. And yet, even in this condition when all hope seemed to be gone, Jonah did not give up. He held on. He knew, he was persuaded that God is still gracious and just to forgive him his sin. He will yet look to God's holy temple where mercy is dispensed to the sinner. He still hopes to be among those who will go up to Jerusalem to give thanks unto the Lord whose mercy endureth forever. No Christian ever gives up hope. Though all seems to be against him and God seems to have forgotten him, he yet clings to God and seizes on the promises which God has made to the sinner. "He that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out," Jesus assures us. The world may deride us and regard us as foolish to continue to believe in God when the billows of affliction appear almost entirely to have overwhelmed us, but we know that we can trust God to be just and lift us up again.

In the following words Jonah gives us a vivid description of the severe trial which God put upon him, how God punished him within an inch of his life and in the very last extremity revived him again and gave him back his life. "The waters compassed me about even to my soul; the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped

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about my head. I went down to the bottoms of the mountains. The earth with her bars was about me forever. Yet hast Thou brought up my life from corruption, O Lord, my God. When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord. And my prayer came in unto Thee into Thine holy temple." As Jonah sank into the depths of the sea, it seemed to him as though the sea had no bottom. As he went down he became entangled in seaweed which bound him like chains. He seemed like in a prison with return to the earth barred against him forever, that he would never see life on earth again. When he reached the bottom of the sea he felt that he had come to the very roots of the mountains, to a most awful depth from which there was no escape any more. And then, in his last extremity, when all hope seemed gone, when his soul was just about to flee from his body, then God reached down into his grave, as it were, and snatched him from corruption, raised him up again and brought him back to life. It was then that he knew that God had heard his prayer, though unuttered and unexpressed at the time. Yea, "hope maketh not ashamed." As the apostle Paul writes: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall

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tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For Thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Yea, rather with God in the flames at the stake, rather with God in filth and rot than in a princely palace without God. Though we have sinned, if we confess our sin, God is also faithful to forgive us our sin and lift us up again. We need never despair of God's mercy. Jonah's experience is a true picture of many a one who for years has forsaken God and His Word and whom God through trials, hardships and tribulations has brought back again from his corruption to praise God for His loving kindness the rest of his days. Believe that God loves even you. Humble yourselves under His mighty hand and He will also exalt you in due time.

"For by grace ye are saved through faith; and

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that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast." Jonah verifies the truth of these apostolic words when he concludes his prayer with the words: "They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy. But I will sacrifice unto Thee with the voice of thanksgiving. I will pay what I have vowed; salvation is of the Lord." All such things in which man places his trust beside God, making them his idols, are "lying vanities." Not to trust in God is like "cutting off your nose to spite your face." With God alone there is mercy and forgiveness. Without God there is no mercy, no goodness, no grace, no fortress, no high tower, no deliverer, no shield, no hope, no defence. Jonah found this out when he foolishly insisted on his own way and fled from the presence of the Lord. "The Lord knoweth the thoughts of man that they are vanity." But "the counsel of the Lord standeth forever, the thoughts of His heart to all generations." There is never any question as to where God stands on any matter. With man it is not so; he is fickle and unstable. It was a true word which was spoken by the wise man: "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool, but whoso walketh wisely shall be delivered." It is

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not without reason that Our Lord Jesus admonishes us to "take heed, watch and pray," that the devil may not overcome us with his "lying vanities" and so rob us of God's mercy and our eternal inheritance in heaven.

Rescued and set on dry land again and brought back to his senses Jonah promises that he will sacrifice with the voice of thanksgiving and that he will pay what he had vowed. Many make promises like Jonah, when they are in extremities. How often does not one hear such promises at sickbeds and how few such vows are ever paid. "If God delivers me out of this trouble, I will be faithful to His Word and attend church regularly and I will be thankful to him by my gifts to the Lord's treasury." But how few ever pay their vows and how soon does the first flush of enthusiasm vanish with the return of good days. Much lip service makes religion a mockery. "Be not deceived: God is not mocked."

"Salvation is of the Lord." That is the sum of Jonah's experience and Jonah's faith. God gives life and God can take it again according to His pleasure. Make God the center of your life. Make the Lord Jesus the aim of your devotion and love, and the Holy Spirit will be the blessed

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Dweller in the temple of your heart. "Lying vanities" will then never find room therein. You will stand firmly grounded and secure, "though the earth be removed and the mountains be cast into the midst of the sea." "For he that wavereth," writes the apostle James, "is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord." Jonah did not and neither will any others like him. "Salvation is of the Lord."

His Remarkable Sermon

JONAH 3:1-4.

THE prayer of Jonah was conceived in the strangest prison where ever man breathed. He fitly called it "the belly of hell." His prayer is like the sigh of the sea, "a voice from the deeps." The most expressive word in it is the personal pronoun "Thou," "Thy,"—"Thou heardest my voice," "Thou hadst cast me into the deep," "Thy billows and Thy waves passed over me," "Thy sight," "Thy holy temple." God did this thing. It was the hand of God which moved the mighty waves. Think of God's mighty sea pressing hard against the side of this living dungeon, striking unspeakable horror and terror in the heart of the fugitive by demanding that he pay the penalty of his sin, and yet demanding him in vain. And with what feeling of thankfulness he uttered his prayer that the Lord had delivered him. If all this is foolish legend, why then was it believed by Milton, the great English poet, by Newton, the brilliant scientist, and by many others as well as by Him "who spake as never man spake"? For our

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Lord Jesus used the great fish, which enclosed Jonah as a dungeon, as a symbol of God's patience with fugitive sinners and of the faithfulness of His promise to His Son, "As Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."

Hardly does Jonah feel the dry land under his feet and the warm sun overhead, when God speaks to him again. The prophet is again called to his post. By his flight he had invalidated his first call, so God called him again. We do not know how God spoke to him and the method is really immaterial. God spoke in diverse ways to the prophets. But we know how God speaks to us, namely, in His Word. And we can understand what He says there. There is no difficulty about His Word. He does not speak to us in a foreign tongue. Neither is His Word obscure that we must apply to an interpreter to find out its meaning.

Rome says that the Bible is fit only for the priesthood. Rome alone is able to understand the Bible. The laity should leave it alone. It is too dark and ambiguous in so many places that lay

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people, the unlearned, should read it. Some years ago during the three hundredth anniversary of the English Translation of the Bible, a Romanist declared that to claim "that the Scriptures alone, without the voice of the Catholic Church explaining them, are intended by God to be a guide and rule of faith," is all wrong, "is the height of absurdity." Again he declared: "The Church (meaning Rome) wrote the New Testament; she alone can tell us what the meaning of it is." Again, "She claims that she alone knows the meaning of their (the Sacred Scriptures') teaching, and alone possesses the right to interpret them to men." But why does Rome make such broad claims? Because she is interested in her "tradition" which is called "that great word that was never written." The Bible according to Rome is "incomplete, and fragmentary, giving us certainly the most important things to know about Our Saviour's earthly life, but still not telling us all we might know." Therefore the Bible must be "interpreted by the living voice of the Catholic Church speaking through her Supreme Head, the Infallible Vicar of Christ. Here we have a Guide that has never failed, and never can, in teaching us our duty both

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to God and man.” In other words, Rome does not want you to read the Bible because there are things in the Bible which do not agree with her tradition. But nowhere in the Bible does God say that we must have an interpreter before we can understand Him. It is rather an odd God which Rome conjures up for us, who can not make Himself understood in His Word. No, God speaks to us clearly enough in His Word. There is no uncertainty about His speech. And if we will heed His voice here in His Scriptures, we shall never go astray, but we shall be blessed. Our Lord Jesus says: “Blessed are they that hear the Word of God and keep it.” He has also commanded us to search and study the Scriptures to find eternal life by faith in Him.

Recall that when God gave Jonah his first commission He gave him instructions what to do. “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it, for their wickedness is come up before Me.” But when He called Jonah the second time, He merely said: “Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching which I bid thee.” Why did God not tell the prophet the message he was to preach? First of all, be-

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cause God had previously told him what to say. But in this instance we may also say that God purposely kept the prophet in ignorance of the contents of the message to test his promise that he would pay what he had vowed and to teach the prophet to obey His commands and to depend on Him for the carrying out of the commission. Before the prophet had insisted on his own ideas and opinions. Now God insisted that His will be done. "So Jonah arose and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord." We are reminded here of the instructions which our blessed Lord gave to His disciples: "Take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you." And we know that "they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the Word with signs following."

The Lord has commanded us, too, to go out into the world and preach the Gospel and to be a witness unto Him. But we have our doubts and fears and we hesitate. On his way to Nineveh Jonah, too, may have again disputed the advisa-

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bility of going to that wicked city. The same opposition which he felt in the first instance may have arisen now too. It is a great metropolis. He would be ridiculed. The people would not listen to him. He would reap all kinds of trouble for his effort. The same disputes and excuses arise in our own hearts today. It is too hard to witness for Christ. We make enemies. People don't like to talk about religion. But before our Lord these excuses do not hold. Jonah stuck to his task and continued on his way "according to the word of the Lord." He withstood in the faith which he had vowed in his God all the "lying vanities" of the devil who tried to prevent him from warning his victims of the impending doom if they did not repent of their wickedness. And the excuses which arise in our hearts to prevent us from witnessing for Christ are the same "lying vanities" which we must resist and overcome. About a thousand years after Jonah, fishermen on the Sea of Galilee were hauling in their nets one morning, after having fished the whole night and catching nothing. Came to the shore that One who always spoke with authority and told them to launch out into the deep and cast their nets again. Who was He to

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teach them their trade? Who ever heard of fishing in broad daylight on the lake? It was against all fisherman's sense and tradition to do so. "Master, we have toiled all the night and have taken nothing; nevertheless at Thy word I will let down the net." You know the result. And so the Lord will also bless our efforts, if we will wade in, launch out into the deep, go out among the people, "and compel them to come in." "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me," says the genuine Christian. With God there is no such thing as failure.

"And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried and said, "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown." At last the prophet after a long and weary journey had reached his destination. The sound of the sea was still in his ears, the remembrance of his harrowing experience in the depths was still fresh in his mind, and his loathing of these Gentiles no doubt welled up in his heart in all its bitterness to tie his tongue as he entered the gate of the city. Alone and unnoticed by the populace composed of people from many nations he proceeded on his way, well into the capital of the East. Hesitatingly he

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raised his voice to proclaim his message in the crowded streets. Perhaps feebly and haltingly he at first uttered his message. It was a simple one: "Yet forty days, Nineveh, overthrown!" More does not cross his lips. Again and again he repeated the same words as he passed down the street. Gradually his voice became stronger. He gained more confidence as he went along. Gradually men began to stop and listen. They became curiously attentive. Like the steady wave beat on the shore rose and fell the voice of the prophet whose appearance drew all eyes. Haggard by his terrible experience in the sea, soiled by travel, with fire in his eyes, his whole bearing as well as his message of judgment to come cast a spell of solemnity upon the gathering crowds. Slowly and steadily he moved onward, looking neither to right nor to left, uttering the same incessant, strange cry: "Yet forty days, Nineveh, overthrown! Yet forty days, Nineveh, overthrown! Yet forty days, Nineveh, overthrown! Yet forty days, Nineveh, overthrown!" What a sermon! Its accents echoing the heavy footsteps of the Judge of all the world as He walked by His ambassador through the streets of that city.

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How long Jonah continued to proclaim that message we do not know. Nor is it material. The sum and substance of his message was the solemn proclamation of the terrible wrath and judgment of God upon the wickedness of men. It was the voice of thunder and lightning, of earthquake, of the trumpet call of Mt. Sinai, pronouncing the doom of eternal damnation upon sinful man. The Almighty was riding in His chariot of the Law, threatening destruction of body and soul in hell to all those who did not repent of their sins. Thank God that we have a different message today. While it is true that the Law must still be preached today, that sin must be exposed, that the wrath and punishment of God upon transgression, iniquity and sin must still be proclaimed in its awful solemnity and severity, yet the real burden of the message of the Church of Jesus Christ has a different tone. "The Law was our school-master to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith," writes the apostle Paul. "By the Law is the knowledge of sin." We preach the Law that men may know that they are sinners and need forgiveness. Then we preach Christ crucified, the Savior of sinners, so that today the bur-

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den of the Church's message is: "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." And the more this blessed Gospel message fills our hearts, the more steadfastly it pours from our lips, the more excellent the fruits it produces in our lives, the more will also zeal inspire us to carry the banner of the cross to all parts of the world and love constrain us to do the will of our Father which is in heaven, who made us meet to be partakers of His inheritance in heaven.

His Remarkable Success

JONAH 3:5-10.

“**A**S the rain cometh down, and the snow from the heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater: so shall My word be that goeth forth out of My mouth. It shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.” Thus speaks the Lord of hosts who commanded Jonah to go to Nineveh and preach unto it the preaching which He would give into his mouth. And entering into the city, the capital of the great Assyrian empire, the prophet had raised his voice to convey the message which until then had remained unknown to him. And what a sermon it was! The prophet discovered that God threatened to destroy the city if its people did not repent of their sins in forty days. Jonah hardly expected the whole city to respond to his message. Afterwards we see that he had hoped that they would not, because he

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hated the Ninevites. They had cruelly oppressed his homeland and evilly treated his countrymen and he wanted to see them punished. And as soon as he discovered the content of his message, he set to his task with a will. "Yet forty days, Nineveh, overthrown!" he cried through the streets of the city. With merciless monotony the solemn message of doom poured from his lips and penetrated every street and highway. And soon the prophetic cry was swollen by tributary cries of the inhabitants. Fear took the city and probably inquiries were flying thick and fast from lip to lip: Who is the enemy? Who is he that shall do this? Where are his armies? Call to the colors! Defend the battlements! Who is the foe? Whence doth he come? And back from the prophet came perhaps the solemn answer: "The Lord, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land!" Terror spread through the city. Messengers hastened with the word to the palace of the king. And before the prophet had traversed more than one-third of the city, the Ninevites, from the imperial palace to the laborer's humble hut had capitulated before the message of the strange prophet. "The people of Nineveh believed God . . . and the king from his

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throne . . . and from the greatest of them even to the least of them," surrendered; as our Lord Jesus says: "they repented at the preaching of Jonah."

We have here a striking proof of the power of God's Word. The human voice when it is burdened with the divine Word is the most powerful factor in the religious life of the world. God has always used the human voice to convey His will to men. Seers, prophets, priests, preachers and evangelists have spoken in the name of the Lord from the beginning of the world. And whenever the human voice was charged with the authority of "thus saith the Lord," it has exercised a power which no power on earth has been able to match or excel. Jonah electrified the city and brought its people at his feet not by fine speech and great oratory, but by a plain statement of the divine truth. And so also the message of salvation which is in Christ Jesus the Savior is not dependent on fine speech or language. As Paul writes to the Corinthians, very cultured people: "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him

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crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." And that is all that is necessary in the preaching of the Church of today. The charge which Paul gave to Timothy is the charge which the Lord of the Church gives to the Christian ministry of today. "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom; preach the Word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." Has not this time come when one surveys the kind of preaching that is done today? The American pulpit today has become more a lecture platform than anything else,—to entertain, to amuse more than to "preach the Word." What

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the world needs is the Word of God, the preaching of repentance and faith.

It is noteworthy in our story that Jonah's message received its first response from among the general populace. The prophet had not been sent to the king but to Nineveh, the people, the inhabitants of that great city. Had the prophet started his mission in the palace of the king, it is sure that he would have accomplished little or nothing. There he probably would have been laughed at and they would have stopped his mouth. But the common people received his message, believed and repented. The same was true of our Lord. We are told that the people heard Him gladly, while the leaders of the Jews opposed Him and sought His life. It has always been so. Paul writes: "For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called; but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty." And our experience is the same. As a rule it is the laborer, the tradesman, the mechanic, the farmer who heeds the Gospel call. And it is of these that our congregations are composed. They

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usually form the nucleus of the congregation and serve God willingly with their gifts. Those who profess no great learning make the first response to the Gospel message. And this is also one of the signs of the coming of the kingdom, which Jesus points out: "The poor have the Gospel preached to them."

However, when the cause of the great commotion in the city finally did reach the king's ears, he too joined the repenting throng, to the surprise of Jonah. And what is more, the king also issued a decree of general fasting and repentance. At the close of his proclamation the king said: "Who knows if the God will turn and repent and turn away from His fierce anger that we perish not." Who knows,—perhaps the God of this prophet will not let us perish if we repent. Mark that the prophet had given them no assurance of mercy at the hands of God. And yet they cherished the hope that God might be merciful. And therein they were not disappointed. That incident may teach a very wholesome lesson in faith. Jesus has said: "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name He will give it you." There are no conditions attached to that promise. And may it be said that if we had more trust in God we would

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get along much better than we do and we would be more content than we are. The reason why we often suffer want in earthly things, why the work in our congregation, why the Gospel in our mission fields does not prosper more than it does, why our labors are often at a standstill, why our treasures are often empty and we have to issue special appeals, is largely due to the fact that we are so slow to ask God's blessing. We need more of the prayer spirit in our Christian life than we have. Indeed, if all of us would habitually and regularly lay the matters of the kingdom before God in prayer, God would bless us abundantly and would permit us to see the wonders of His grace. "Ask and ye shall receive," says our Lord. "Ye have not because ye ask not," says the apostle James.

The Ninevites asked and received. They did not hope in vain. "And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way. And God repented of the evil that He had said that He would do unto them. And He did it not." Here are words over which many have stumbled. How can God repent? Let us remember that the Bible is God's revelation to man. He therefore uses our human language; He uses our mode of expressing ourselves. When a man has decided to

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do a thing and later learns better, gains more knowledge of the thing and changes his mind and does not do it, we say that he repented of the deed. The Bible here as elsewhere puts such speech in the mouth of God. But when God repents of a thing and changes His mind, this does not imply any sorrow or error or correction of judgment on the part of God. God sees the end from the beginning. "God is not a man that He should lie, neither the son of man that He should repent," says God's Word. And again we read: "Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world." When therefore God, as in the case of Nineveh, at first reveals His wrath and conceals His mercy, and then later manifests the fullness and abundance of His grace, the Bible describes this as repentance on the part of God. This explanation may not be wholly satisfactory to our reason. God does not promise to satisfy our reason in all that He has revealed in His Word. Luther once wrote: "I always observe this rule that I avoid as much as I can all those questions which draw one up to the throne of divine majesty." In other words, it is better to keep your feet on the ground than to soar to heights where you can not keep your head clear.

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We now know only in part, but then, in that day, we shall know God even as He is known.

And God saw that the people repented of their sins and turned from their evil ways and He did not destroy them. Let us remember that this occurred at a time when Israel was going from bad to worse. Israel at this time had fallen away from God and was following after other gods. While Israel was being rejected, God was calling unto Himself children from other nations to glorify His holy name. And we may say that words which Jesus spoke against the impenitent generation of His day many centuries after were already being fulfilled in these Ninevites. "And I say unto you that many shall come from the East and West and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." And the words apply also to our own day. The apostle Peter describes Christians as "a chosen generation," as in the Old Testament the Israelites were the chosen people of God. And so we may say that those who have been raised in the Lutheran Church, have been nourished with the pure and unadulter-

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ated milk of the Word and have been hedged about with the love and grace of God through our Lord Jesus Christ, may be called "children of the kingdom." They were called by the Gospel into Christ's kingdom and at His altar they pledged allegiance to the banner of the Cross. And yet how many of these "children of the kingdom" have not forsaken their Master and have followed after the "lying vanities" of the world and have sold their birthright. Christ purchased and won these too with His holy precious blood, but they have forfeited their glorious inheritance. They are no more with us. But such is the wonder of God's grace that many are coming from the East and West and entering into the kingdom and sitting down with Jesus to sup with Him. We are experiencing that in our congregation. While many are murmuring at the ready supply of manna from the Word of God and are seeking after the fleshpots of the world which lies in Egyptian darkness, those "who sometime were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ" and are taking the places of those who have discarded the wedding garment of Jesus' blood and righteousness.

Jesus, Refuge of the weary,
Object of the Spirit's love,

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Fountain in life's desert dreary,
Savior from the world above;
O how oft Thine eyes offended
Gaze upon the sinner's fall!
Yet upon the cross extended
Thou didst bear the pain of all.

And finally let us note that the conversion of the Ninevites, Jonah's remarkable success, was due entirely to the preaching of God's message. It was not due to his oratory or his personality. Jesus says that the Ninevites "repented at the preaching of Jonah." And He added: "a greater than Jonah is here." Indeed, Jesus is come. He revealed to us the love of His heavenly Father for us sinners. We have a greater, a more wonderful message than the Ninevites ever received,—the message that "the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin." If those Ninevites repented, though they were given no promise of forgiveness in Jonah's preaching, how much greater is not our responsibility to the Gospel, to hear the Word of God gladly, to repent of our sins daily, daily to come forth new men and women in the faith which is in Christ Jesus, and willingly to serve Him our Lord with sincere devotion to His cause? "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required."

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Would to God that the "children of the kingdom" would everywhere awake to a greater appreciation of the great responsibility which is theirs, to be faithful to the Christ! Lord God, stir up the gift which is in us, which we have received by the laying on of hands at Thine altar, that we watch and pray and work in Thy great and blessed kingdom, so that "the men of Nineveh may not rise up in judgment with the men of this generation" and condemn us! Prosper Thy Word everywhere and give it free course, so that it may accomplish that for which Thou hast sent it, the salvation of souls for Thy heavenly kingdom.

His Remarkable Failure

JONAH 4:1-11.

OUR Lord Jesus once said: "Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels over one sinner that repenteth." Imagine, if you will, a large gathering of the blessed angels of God. An archangel, standing before them, holds a record in his hand and the angelic audience is listening with rapt attention as his angelic voice retells the story of Jonah. There is no stir in their ranks as the reader tells of the flight of Jonah. They know that it is the nature of man to disobey God. They are not surprised at the wild tempest, nor at the report of the sleeping prophet, nor that the lot fell on Jonah, nor that the sailors cast him into the sea, nor that he was seized by a great fish, nor at his remarkable deliverance. They are pleased with the prophet's song of thanksgiving. Their hearts are moved with gladness that the prophet goes to Nineveh according to the word of the Lord. And with the report that the whole city repented and believed in God the angelic

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audience burst into a wave of melody and jubilation at the victory which the Word of God had again won over the hearts of men. When the last note of that praise had died away the archangel resumed the story with this fourth chapter which is before us. As the first words fell from his lips uneasiness began to stir the angelic audience. The angels are amazed. They are surprised. They are startled. Is it possible? Can it be true? Is it credible that the prophet of God who had enjoyed so many favors, who had been so lovingly dealt with, whom the Lord had snatched from the jaws of death, who had been given another chance to redeem himself, and upon whose preaching God had laid such wonderful success,—is it possible that this prophet should dare to reason with God, that the creature should be angry with the Creator? No, it can not be! It is unbelievable!

All this is a parable, of course. My aim is merely to show you that the end of this story has the opposite effect in heaven to that which it has among men. The critics of this story are aroused to object to the great fish, the rescue, the prayer, the sermon, the prophet's success, and other parts of the beginning of the story, but when they come

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to this last part their criticism subsides. Jonah's stubbornness, his controversy with God, his rebellious mood does not seem to stir natural man. Why is this? Why are our feelings different from those of the angels? It is because "natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit, they are foolishness unto him." It is because we have the same heart as Jonah. He is flesh of our flesh and bone of our bone. God's Word says that man's heart is desperately wicked. "Who can know it?" We know that we are like Jonah. Our daily experience proves it. We feel in harmony with him. Our Old Adam sympathizes with him. Even the apostle Paul had to admit: "For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do." Or as the poet says:

I know that sin and guilt combine
To reign o'er every thought of mine,
And turn from good to ill;
I know that when I try to be
Upright, and just, and true to Thee,
I am a sinner still.

We can understand Jonah's mood, but we can not understand why God should have repented of what He had said that He would do unto Nineveh. We are always contrary. How often do we

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not make fervent prayers to God in our trouble and call upon Him to help us and thank Him for deliverance and vow solemn vows of betterment and amendment. But no sooner are our heads above the waters of tribulation, no sooner do we enjoy peace and prosperity again, and our Old Adam becomes heady-minded, conveniently forgets the promises made, and begins to murmur and complain against a gracious Providence, and discontent and dissatisfaction spread the shadow of their wings over our lives. Jonah's heart is our heart. In him we see a reflection of ourselves.

Jonah declares: "I pray Thee, O Lord, was this not my saying when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish." In other words: Isn't it true what I claimed when you first commanded me to go to Nineveh? I knew you would not destroy Nineveh, if it repented. I tried to make that known to you when I fled to Tarshish. But you would not believe me. You called me back and you made me go to that wicked city and now see, you have done exactly as I anticipated. You have not done what you said you would do unto the people of Nineveh. They repented and you forgave them. Why should you

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be merciful to sinners like that? We are startled to hear the creature argue so with the Creator. And yet we can in a way understand why Jonah should have begrudged these Ninevites the mercy of God.

The Jews always labored under the fixed idea that Israel was the chosen people of God and that nobody outside of Israel could hope to receive any favors from God. "Pour out Thy wrath upon the heathen that have not known Thee and upon the kingdoms that have not called upon Thy name." The heathen deserved no consideration. Israel had no regard for the salvation of people outside of the camp of Israel. And even though some from other nations did accept the true God, these were regarded as proselytes, not on an equal footing with the Jews. Recall how our Lord disputed with the Jews of His day, how they insisted that they were the descendants of Abraham. They worshipped Abraham more than they did God. It was ancestor worship. How they prided themselves in the fact that they were "Abraham's seed." "Abraham is our father." And Jesus had to tell them: "If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham." And the early Christians had a similar

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idea. We find that at first they preached the Gospel to none but the Jews. And when Peter crossed the threshold of a Gentile's home and told Cornelius of the Saviour he was vehemently rebuked. And the same narrow view prevails even today among many Christians, who argue against sending missionaries to other countries, who refuse to contribute to the mission work of the Church, who insist that "charity begins at home" in the home church, who maintain that we have no business to disturb the heathen in their religion. Who has not heard these arguments? And usually those who are so selfish and narrow do very little, if anything, for the home church. When the woman in Simon's house at Bethany poured the precious ointment on Jesus' head, one of His disciples said with indignation: "To what purpose is this waste?" You know who it was who became so indignant. It was the treasurer among the disciples, whom John called a thief. Why, do you suppose, does Jesus say: "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature?" The genuine Christian knows the reason and he gladly and willingly obeys his Master and uses those means which God has given him to help spread the Gospel of salvation that

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souls may be saved and God's heavenly house may be full of the redeemed of Christ. Let us not selfishly hoard our blessings and keep them to ourselves. We must expand and grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ and seek to do His will even as He did the will of His Father in heaven.

But to return to our story,—allow me to call your attention to a very peculiar inconsistency in the behavior of Jonah. He “was angry with God and prayed unto the Lord.” He was displeased with God and yet he asked God to do him a favor. It was an odd favor at that, for he asked God to let him die. He was done with the world. Not long before he could not thank God enough because he had rescued him from death. And how he was filled with terror at the thought of death! And now he asked God, the God with whom he was angry and displeased, to do him the odd favor to let him die! What contradictions and inconsistencies are we not guilty of! For surely we are no better than Jonah. We act the same way. And how patiently God bears with our weaknesses! Despite the fact that the prophet behaved so unseemly, God does not treat him as an enemy but as a friend. He deals with him as

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a father deals with his son. God merely replies: "Doest thou well to be angry?" Kindly and gently God deals with his recalcitrant child. How softly He speaks. He could just as well have annihilated Jonah on the spot with a thunderbolt of His righteous wrath. But God did not choose to deal so with His creature. "Love is not easily provoked." "Love suffereth long and is kind." What man would show such longsuffering and patience as God does with His erring children? Like a gentle shepherd He goes after His straying sheep and brings them home to the fold.

Deeply grieved and disappointed Jonah left the city and went out to the eastern hills, where he had a good view of the city. There he built himself a shelter and sat in its shade, waiting to see what God would do to the city after having reasoned with Him. While he sat there God made a cucumber vine to grow over his shelter to comfort him in his grief. And Jonah was glad because it shaded him and because he thought that God was pleased with him. As God treated Jonah so God deals with us. He helps us over many a worry and trial by providing us with little delights. The unexpected visit of a friend, the happy prattle of a child, a bright ray of sunshine

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falling across our path, the song of a bird,—indeed, who will count the innumerable small pleasures with which God fills our daily life and at such moments when we need them most and least expect them? So often we overlook them and miss them because we hang our heads. Let us look up and around us more and observe the many insignificant yet blessed pleasures which He scatters along our path to help us over the rough spots of the road. These are the precious drops of love which he sends us daily from heaven, like the refreshing dew of the morning.

But though Jonah was pleased with the blessing of the vine, he had not changed heart. He was the same stubborn prophet. So God had to deal with him more earnestly. When Jonah awoke the next morning, lo, the vine had withered. His shelter was ruined. Now why had God done that? Why did He rob him of this pleasure? But more; soon a strong desert wind arose from the East and the burning rays of the sun beat down upon his head and he was covered with the dust of the desert. Jonah was overcome and fainted. When he came to again he exclaimed out of the depth of his misery: "It is better for me to die than to live!" This time it was not a prayer, but

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a burst of indignation and despair. What is the use of living! as we hear people complain today when trouble overtakes them. And when God says to him: "Doest thou well to be angry with the gourd?" Jonah burst out impatiently: "I do well to be angry, even unto death!" Everything is wrong with the world, with God, with life, with everything! It is all futile, hopeless! But God reasoned with him: "Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for which thou hast not labored, neither madest it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night. And should I not spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than six score thousand persons that can not discern between their right hand and their left hand, and also much cattle?" How merciless you are! You have pity on a plant which was killed by a worm, because you lost its shelter, and yet you will have no pity on the Ninevites, will show them no mercy. You are so hard-hearted that you have not even pity on children, innocent babes; more than that, not even on the dumb brutes of the field, the cattle. If you had your way you would cold-bloodedly, mercilessly, tyrannically, ruthlessly, brutally, savagely destroy these Ninevites. Ah, blessed is man that he has not you for his God, but that I

HIS REMARKABLE FAILURE

am "the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin."


With this unanswerable rebuke from heaven the story closes, leaving Jonah sitting there stunned, bewildered, speechless; the great city with its happy thousands in his sight, the low of the many cattle in his ears, the bitter East wind in his eyes and in his hair, disappointment and chagrin in his heart, and hanging over his head the fragments of the withered vine, a picture of the most remarkable failure in the history of the Bible. Who would care to sit beside him? Hardly any, you think. But you are mistaken; he has plenty of company under the tatters of his futile shelter. The hopeless and fanatic infidel who like Cain would kill his brother because he can not comprehend God; the gloomy Christian who lingers many a needless hour at the foot of Mt. Sinai and groans under the yoke of his self-imposed laws and statutes; the slave to passion and selfishness who in his final disillusion bursts forth into a despairing cry to which the darkness of hopelessness makes no reply; the fanatic who grieves and mourns and murmurs that the heavens

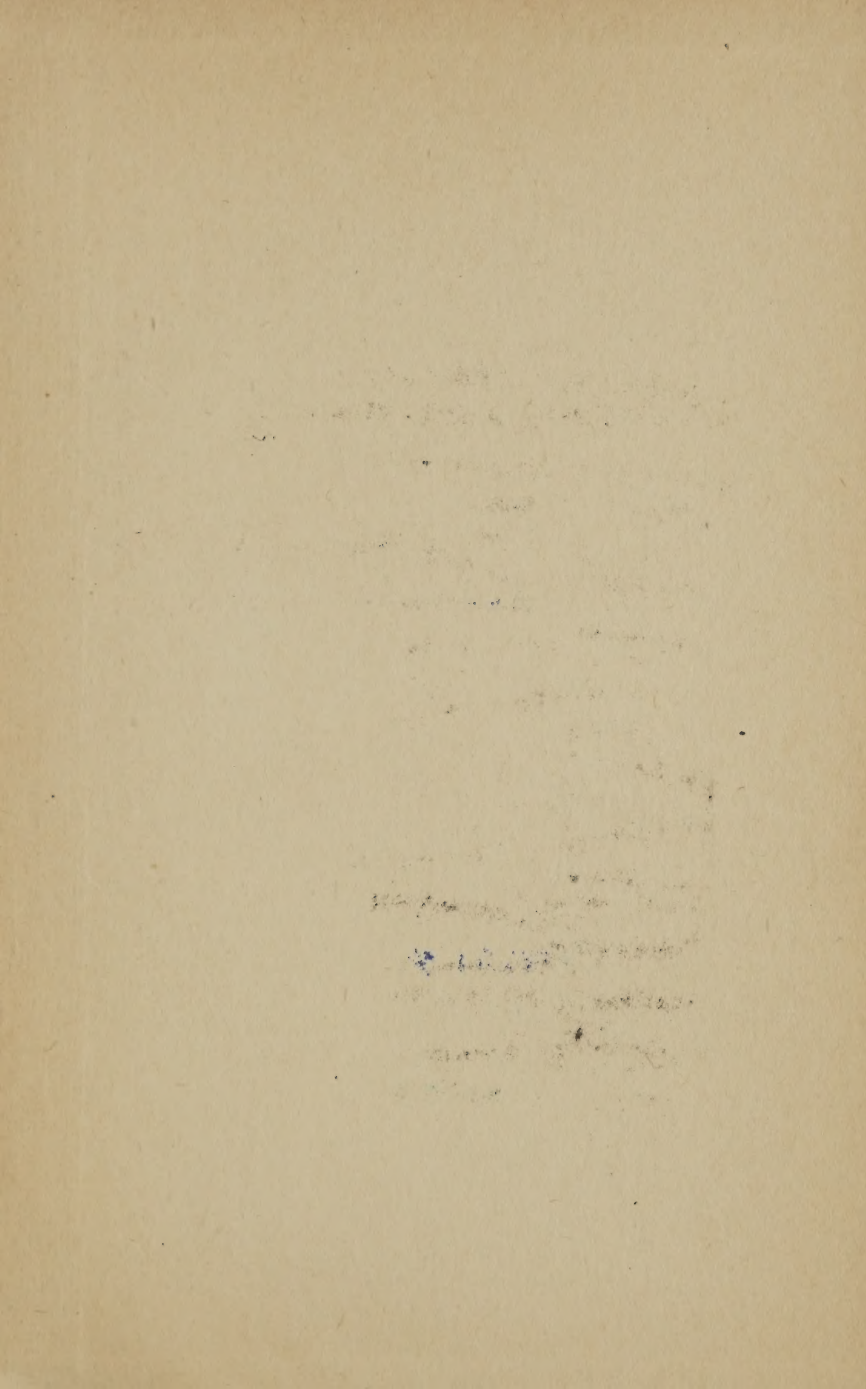
THE PROPHET JONAH

do not respond to his vindictive feelings—such and related figures have sought shelter with the prophet. It is of little moment to speculate whether Jonah was finally humbled. Enough if I have succeeded with God's gracious guidance to show you that this much maligned story of Jonah, like all the Scripture, is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction, and for comfort. The aim of all prophecy is the Messiah. The whole Old Testament revolves around that blessed Christ who in more than one respect could say of Himself: "A greater than Jonah is here."

Abiding, steadfast, firm, and sure,
The teachings of the Word endure:
Blest he who trusts this steadfast Word,
His anchor holds in Christ, the Lord.

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